

March 18, 2004

**SCHAKOWSKY PRESSES FOR
IMPROVED CAR SAFETY STANDARDS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today continued to press for improved safety standards in cars to ensure that consumers, especially [children](#), are protected. Schakowsky, who is the ranking Democrat on the Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection Subcommittee, issued the following statement during a hearing on the reauthorization of the National Highway and Transportation Safety Act:

Thank you, Chairman Stearns, for holding this hearing today on the reauthorization of the National Highway and Transportation Safety Act and the challenges facing NHTSA as it works to meet its safety improvement responsibilities. I would also like to recognize and thank my ranking member, Representative John Dingell, for being here today. And I want to welcome our witnesses who are here to share with us their views on how to improve safety, reduce fatalities and injuries, and better protect children.

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In 2002, 42,815 people died in motor vehicle crashes - the highest number in over a decade. Nearly three million more people were injured. Those numbers do not include children who were injured or killed in and around cars that were not in traffic. A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study found that between July 2000 and June 2001 an estimated 9,160 children suffered nonfatal injuries and 78 children were killed in non-traffic accidents. Those numbers, too, are cause for alarm. While they are not included in the official NHTSA statistics, they do count in families. We must do all we can in order to limit accidents that are otherwise avoidable and to ensure that vehicles on and off the road are as safe as possible.

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Increasingly, we are seeing problems on our roads that stem from the fact that people are buying bigger and tougher vehicles. In fact, half of new vehicles purchased are SUVs, vans, and pickup trucks. This has led to an increased number of rollover accidents and crashes where bigger vehicles cause severe damage to people in smaller vehicles. Deaths in rollover crashes increased to a record 10,666 in 2002, 500 more rollover deaths than occurred in 2001. Rollover deaths accounted for one-third of all passenger occupant fatalities in 2002. We must approach this issue by working to

prevent rollovers from happening, as well as improving protections for people in cases where rollovers do occur.□□□□

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I am encouraged to hear that NHTSA is working to study crash avoidance technology.□□ In addition, consumer advocates have proposed that we adopt standards dealing with roof strength, rollover resistance, seat belt design, crash ejection prevention, as well as design characteristics to reduce the threats posed by more aggressive vehicles.□□ I believe that we need to act in those areas.□

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I also want to address the issue of our children's safety in and around cars.□ I have joined my colleague, Rep. Peter King in introducing H.R. 3683, the Cameron Gulbransen Kids and Cars Safety Act.□ One evening, two-year old Cameron followed his dad out of the house as he went to move the family's SUV into the driveway.□ Cameron's father was not aware that his son was there and backed over him, killing him almost instantly.□ Unfortunately, this is not a lone occurrence. Our bill would require NHTSA to conduct a study of "back over prevention technologies" and to establish a data base to keep track of these types of non-traffic, non-crash-related injuries and deaths.□ Finally, this bill would address the issue of children being inadvertently killed or injured by power windows by requiring that car manufacturers install child-proof, auto reverse mechanisms.□ The technology exists and there is no reason it should not be used in all new cars.□□

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The standards in the Kids and Cars Safety Act, as well as the rollover, crash avoidance, and other safety concerns, are critical issues for this Subcommittee to consider.□ I hope that this briefing will help to start a dialogue among all parties involved so that we can come to some agreement on how to achieve our common goals of consumer protection and safer highways and safer cars.